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SUBJECT: KING ABDULLAH VISITS IRAN

Classified By: Amb. Edward Gnehm for reasons 1.5 B and D

¶1. (U) King Abdullah visited Tehran September 2-3 in what President Khatami termed &a significant turning point in relations.8 Local and regional media sources referred to the visit as &landmark8 and &a new chapter in bilateral relations.8 Accompanied by Prime Minister Ali Abul Ragheb and several other ministers, the King met with President Khatami, Supreme Leader Khamenei, and Foreign Minister Kharazi during the visit. It was the first visit to Iran by a Jordanian head-of-state since the fall of the Shah, though diplomatic ties were restored in 1991 and Abdullah and Khatami met previously on the margins of the Millenium Summitt in 2000.

¶2. (U) According to public statements, the two sides discussed the situation in Iraq, and while generally positive on recent events, including the formation of the Iraqi cabinet, both sides expressed concern for the continued instability and human suffering there. They also discussed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with King Abdullah highlighting Jordan,s efforts to reach a just and lasting peace and President Khatami noting Jordan,s "long history of struggle and suffering in defending the Palestinian cause." On bilateral relations, including Iranian offers of economic, scientific, educational and cultural cooperation, Khatami stated that "our rapprochement with Jordan will not be at the expense of any other party."

¶3. (C) Subsequent to the visit, Ali al-Ayed, Director of Foreign Minister Muasher's Private Office, told PolOff that Iran had proposed to Jordan "a security agreement like the ones it has with Bahrain and Saudi Arabia." Ayed said the government would "send the proposal to a technical team" for further study.

¶4. (S/NF) In a September 8 meeting with the Ambassador, the King stated that he did not like or trust the Iranians, but he wanted to "test the waters." He thought common ground could be found in battling Sunni terrorists like al-Qaeda. He met with a senior MOIS official, Younissi, who explicitly said this was an area of mutual interest with Jordan and the U.S. The King also asserted that the Iranians are "terrified" at the idea of the breakup of Iraq. The Iranians made it clear that Jordanian cooperation on MEK would be an important element for closer cooperation on other terrorist elements.

¶5. (S) COMMENT: Given King Hussein's close friendship with the Shah, it is not surprising that no Jordanian monarch has visited Iran since the 1970s. Over the past couple of years, however, the Iranians have pressed for a royal visit. The Jordanians had previously sent the Foreign Minister and intelligence chief to break the ice.

¶6. (S/NF) Especially after the arrest of three Hezbollahis smuggling rockets from Syria into Jordan in 2001, probably for use in the West Bank, the GOJ has been hesitant to engage Iran in a high profile manner. However, the possibility of gaining information on al-Qaeda members in Iran, and other possible inducements, convinced King Abdullah to break the quarter century chill in relations. END COMMENT.
HALE